



E-bugs 'cost firms billions'

A RAPID rise in the number of destructive computer viruses is costing British businesses billions of pounds, a Government-backed report warned yesterday.

Half of all companies – and two-thirds of large firms – were blighted by Internet bugs last year, three times as many as four years ago.

However, 72 per cent of companies and 83 per cent of large firms received infected e-mails – meaning the majority failed to stop them infecting machines despite anti-virus software.

Viruses can cripple computer networks, disable Internet sites, delete files and clog up e-mail inboxes leading to loss of business and reduced productivity that may last for weeks. Chris

Potter, lead author of the report, said it should act as a 'wake-up call' to thousands of companies who urgently need to improve their defences.

Mr Potter, a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers, said: "There are millions of businesses in the UK and half have had virus infections. If you look at the number of infections and the scale of the damage, the cost quickly runs into billions of pounds.

"The average business is being infected twice a year – and more often for big companies with lots of computers. It is very hard to foresee a day when the danger will not be there."

Mr Potter, who led the survey of 1,000 firms on behalf of the Department of Trade and Indus-

try, said too many firms left themselves vulnerable by not updating defences often enough.

The Blaster 'worm' was the biggest single culprit last year, causing a third of all infections. But already in the first two months of 2004 the Mydoom bug has become the quickest spreading and most damaging virus of all time, having cost businesses an estimated £40 billion worldwide and rising.

Gerhard Eschelbeck, of security specialist Qualys which sponsored the survey, said: "The sophistication of the latest generation of worms demands that business takes a much more proactive stance on security."

The full results of the DTI survey will be published next month.